

Merchant and Nuuanu Streets --
Irwin Block (Nippu Jiji Building)
912-928 Nuuanu Street
Honolulu
Honolulu County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-55 M

HABS
HI,
2-HONLU,
18-M-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HABES
HI,
2-HONOLU
18-M-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERCHANT AND NUUANU STREETS COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS
THE IRWIN BLOCK (The Nippu Jiji Building)

HABS No. HI-55 M

Location: 912-928 Nuuanu Street, City & County of Honolulu, Hawaii.
Zone 1, Sec. 7, Plat. 02, #40.

Present Owner: Robert Gerrell
841 Bishop Street
Honolulu, HI

Present Occupant and Use: Multiple commercial use.

Significance: The Irwin Block was built on speculation and used as a wholesale store, but its second and most prominent occupant was the Nippu Jiji, or Hawaii Times, newspaper. This newspaper played an important role in shaping the opinions of the first- and second-generation Japanese community in Hawaii.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION.

A. Physical History.

1. Date of erection: 1897. The Irwin Block was constructed in 1897. [Thrum's Annual, 1897, and Pacific Commercial Advertiser, 1-2-1897, p.1.]
2. Architect: the office of C. B. Ripley received the commission. It is probable that Charles William Dickey, working with Ripley at that time, designed the building. [Hawaii Architect, 2-1979, p. 16. For biographical information on Dickey, see Bishop Estate Building, HABS No. HI-55 H.]
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1899	William Irwin
1923	sold to <u>Nippu Jiji</u> , later the <u>Hawaii Times</u>
1986	sold to Robert Gerrell

[Thrum's Annual, 1897, City directories, Tax records, and Pacific Building News, 2-24-1986.]
4. Original plans and construction: The building was a two-story lava-stone construction, with storefronts at the ground floor and Romanesque windows at the second level. Access to the building was through three symmetrically placed doors, one in each bay of the Nuuanu Street facade.

5. Alterations and additions: In 1923 the words "Nippu Jiji" and the dates "1895" and "1923" were carved into the facade. The door in the third bay (the northernmost or mauka door) was closed off, probably between 1923 and 1927. [Date of Nippu Jiji's occupation and Sanborn map corrected to 1927.] Unspecified minor repairs are documented in 1957-58. [Building permit 1-7-02-40, #'s 135679 and 143486.] In 1982 the architecture firm of Norman Licayo remodelled the building, which included the introduction of a mezzanine level, and designed a five-story addition to the rear.

B. Historical Context:

The Irwin Block was built on speculation by sugar industry capitalist William G. Irwin at a cost of \$20,000. Yoichi Takakuwa, a Japanese merchant, was the first occupant of the Irwin Block and operated a wholesale store there. Takakuwa was a leader of the Reform Association, established May 7, 1905. This organization advocated the removal of the Japanese Consul General, the elimination of illegal treatment of Japanese emigrants, and the suppression of illegal activities of the Keihin Bank, a Japanese emigration company. [Pacific Commercial Advertiser, 1-2-1897, p.1; Wakakuwa.]

In 1923, the Japanese newspaper Nippu Jiji, the descendant of the second-oldest Japanese newspaper in Hawaii, purchased the building. The first Japanese newspaper to be published in the Hawaiian islands was the Nippon Shuho, begun in 1892. It was joined in 1895, when the number of Japanese immigrants was increasing rapidly following the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95, by the Yamato. The Yamato began as a six-page weekly, with a circulation of a few hundred. Between 1895 and 1905, its ownership changed four times. In 1896 it became the Yamato Shinbun, and increased publication to tri-weekly. In 1905, Yasutaro Soga became proprietor and editor. On November 3, 1906, the paper became the Nippu Jiji.

The Japanese press and its publications played an important role in the lives of the early Japanese settlers. It was their primary means of contact with the world, and therefore was somewhat in a position of power. The press aided the Japanese laborers by calling to their attention any injustices being inflicted upon them, and became the champion of the people's rights.

In January, 1919, the Nippu Jiji began including an English section, geared specifically for the second-generation Japanese in Hawaii. As a historian of the 1930s states:

The remarkable achievements and progress made by the Nippu Jiji during the past two-score years are comparable to those of the Japanese community of Hawaii as a whole. From a crude and unsettled pioneer community the Japanese people have fashioned it into what it is today -- well-organized, a materially and culturally richer and finer community. [Wasukawa; Conroy.]

On October 16, 1942, stockholders and directors voted unanimously to change the name of the Nippu Jiji to the Hawaii Times. [Honolulu Advertiser, 10-28-1942.] The Nippu Jiji relocated its offices in 1984, and ceased operation in 1985. [City directories.] The building is presently used for rental commercial space, housing law offices and a beauty salon.

Report prepared by Laura S. Alderman, Project Historian.

For background information on this downtown neighborhood, see HABS No. HI-55.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Irwin Block is a heavily rusticated stone building in the Richardsonian Romanesque tradition. The symmetrical facade has three identical upper bays highlighted by arched windows and checkerboard stone patterns. The first floor's modified commercial fronts are protected by a projecting canopy.
2. Condition of fabric: The building appears to be in excellent condition. The interior has been extensively altered. A penthouse addition has been built atop the building but it is set back from the street facade. A five-story addition was built at the rear of the lot.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures 79'-3" along Nuuanu Street by about 80' deep and 39' high. It is three bays wide.
2. Foundations: Not visible for inspection.
3. Walls: The Nuuanu Street facade is of cut volcanic stone. The ground floor of the main facade is given over to commercial fronts. The second floor had three identical bays of heavily rusticated stone. Each bay has a large arched window and the upper portion of the wall has a checkerboard pattern of recessed and projecting square stones.

4. Structural system, framing: There are brick and stone bearing walls. The interior structure has been totally replaced and is of steel supporting wood floors in the old building. The newer portions of the building are of concrete.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies and bulkheads: A projecting flat canopy is hung from the face of the building to shelter the store fronts.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are entry doorways in the center and left bays of the street facade. Both doorways are recessed and have double doors with large glass panels over small wood panels. The ground-floor composition of the right-hand bay suggests a former doorway. This doorway had been set off from the rest of the ground-floor openings by a stone pier, the only mid-bay pier on the facade. The probable doorway may have provided access to the second floor. All the doorways are new.
 - b. Windows: The first floor has new large plate-glass windows over low wainscots with grill inserts. The windows are set in wood frames. Above these openings and the projecting canopy are transom windows. The second-floor windows are set into a large arch flanked by single windows in each bay. Below the arch and the stone transom are three wood one-over-one-light double-hung-sash windows which are separated from each other by stone mullions and from the flanking windows of the same kind by a stone pier. The transom windows are divided by stone mullions into three units corresponding to the windows below. The side window units in the arch are of fixed glass. The center unit is a hopper type. The arch has stone voussoirs. The piers have shouldered blocks to suggest capitals.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The building has a flat roof atop which a penthouse unit has been built. The remainder of the roof has a surface for walking. The penthouse and the five-story addition behind have false hip roofs around a flat portion.
 - b. Cornice, parapet: The stone cornice is corbeled and scalloped. The parapet is a stone railing with stone blocks for balusters. In the center is the sign, "1895-1923. THE NIPPU JIJI."

C. Description of Interior:

The interior has undergone extensive alteration. No original fabric remains. The second floor has an additional level (third floor) inserted within. This space is undeveloped at the time of this report. The large addition to the rear has a two-story office space at the fifth level. The interiors of the rest of the addition are unfinished.

D. Site:

The building sits mid-block on the Ewa side of Nuuanu Street in the Chinatown Historic District. It is contiguous with the T.R. Foster building to the left (makai direction) and a remodeled building to the right (mauka direction). The site slopes slightly down in the makai direction. The building occupies the entire lot to its property lines. There is no landscaping.

In this description, local designation is given for orientation. "Mauka" means mountain direction, "Makai" means sea direction, "Diamond Head" means in the direction of Diamond Head crater, "Ewa" means in the direction of the town of Ewa (opposite Diamond Head direction).

Report prepared by Robert C. Giebner, Project Supervisor.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

From the Bishop Museum Photograph Collection:

Files: "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Merchant St. 1900-",
"Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Nuuanu Ave. Downtown Area."

Baker, Ray Jerome. Honolulu Then and Now. # 31118.

B. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Hawaii Directories, 1900-present. Hawaii State Archives and Bishop Museum Library.

Maps: Lion Fire Insurance Company, 1879. Bishop Museum Map Collection.

B. F. Dillingham Fire Insurance Co. for Board of Fire Underwriters of Honolulu, 1900, and 1906 corrected to 1911. Bishop Museum Map Collection, Hawaii State Archives.

Tax Records, Tax Assessor's office, 842 Bethel Street, Honolulu, Hawaii. Records for "Zone 2, Sec. 7, Plat 02, #40."

Building Permits, Municipal Building, Honolulu, Hawaii. #'s 135679, 143486.

Hawaii State Archives "Historic Buildings Task Force" File TMK 2-7-02-40". University of Hawaii architecture student's 1966 report on the Nippu Jiji Building.

C. Secondary and Published Sources:

Pacific Commercial Advertiser
3-12-1895
1-2-1897

Honolulu Star Bulletin
4-24-1943

Honolulu Advertiser
10-28-1942, p.3

Pacific Building News
2-24-1986

Conroy, Hilary. The Japanese Frontier in Hawaii, 1868-1898. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953.

_____ and T. Scott Miyakawa, eds. East Across the Pacific: Historical & Sociological Studies of Japanese Immigration and Assimilation. Santa Barbara: American Bibliographical Center, Clio Press, 1972.

Merrill, William Dickey. "Charles William Dickey, Architect." Hawaii Architect 1-1979, p.12.

Peterson, Charles E. "Pioneer Architects and Builders of Honolulu." Annual Reports of the Hawaiian Historical Society, 1964.

Thrum, Thomas. Hawaiian Almanac and Annual. Honolulu: Black & Auld Printers, 1897, p.127.

Uhlmann, Charles. "C. B. Ripley: The Middle Years," Hawaii Architect 2-1979.

Wakakuwa, Ernest K. A History of the Japanese People in Hawaii. Honolulu: The Toyo Shoin, 1938.

The Architecture of C. W. Dickey: Evolution of A Hawaiian Style. State of Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources, Historic Sites Inventory, 1984.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by First American Title Co., Historic Hawaii Foundation, and the National Park Service. Recorded under the direction of Kenneth L. Anderson, Chief of HABS, and Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, the project was completed during the summer of 1987 at the Honolulu field office. Project supervisor was Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona); project historian was Laura S. Alderman (Washington, D.C.); architectural foreman was J. Scott Anderson (Washington, D.C.); and architectural technicians were Coy E. Burney (University of Maryland), Kenneth R. Imoehl (University of Arizona), and Michel A. van Ackere (Brown University).